

## Socio-economic Status of Missing Women: A Case Study of Jonai Revenue Circle of Dhemaji District, Assam, India

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### Abstract

Women constitute indispensable part of a society. When women are economically and socially empowered, they become a potent force for change. But the inequalities between women and men make it difficult for women to fulfill their potential. The status of women in a society is a significant reflection of the level of social justice in that society. Women's status is often described in terms of their level of income, employment, education, health and fertility as well as the roles they play within the family, the community and society (Ghosh, 1987).

With the above background, an attempt is made in this paper to understand the socio-economic status of Missing women. The study is based on data obtained from selected Census of India volumes for 1971 and 2001, primary data collected from the selected villages and relevant literature on the tribes of Assam. The data so obtained have been processed and analysed with the help of meaningful statistical techniques.

**Keywords: Socio Economic Status; Missing Women; Jonai Revenue Circle; Dhemaji District**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A tribal woman occupies an important place in the socio-economic structure of her society. The Dhebar Commission Report (1961) mentions that the tribal women is not drudge or a beast of burden, she is found to exercising a free and firm hand in all aspects related to her social life unlike in non-tribal societies. The tribal women in general and in comparison with castes, enjoy more freedom in various walks of life. Traditional and customary tribal norms are comparatively more liberal to women (Basu, 1993). However, after a comparative analysis of the various political organizations, religion, ritual practices, etc. among the different tribes of India, it has been observed that the status of tribal women is comparatively lower than that of tribal men. Moreover, the status of tribal women has gone from bad to worse as a result of the impact of social change which has affected the social structure of tribal society (Chauhan, 1990).

The Misings are the second largest Scheduled tribe (Plains) group of Assam after the Bodos and they are mainly concentrated in the riverine areas of the state occupying a population of about 5.9 lakhs (2001 Census). Women in the Mising societies occupy an honourable position enjoying considerable freedom in day today life. The Mising women play a role of great importance both economically and socially. In fact, in economical structure, she plays a very strong role. The women rear pigs, goats, poultry, etc. which form a great share of family income. The Mising women participate equally with men in the agricultural activities. The Mising women have also started to market their weaving products. Thus,

it can be undeniably claimed that the Mising women play a great role in economically supporting the family. But when it comes to the role she plays in the social structure, the picture becomes quite different (Pegu, 2010). With the above background, an attempt is made in this paper to understand the socio-economic status of Mising women and also to suggest measures and strategies for the overall development.

### 2. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the present study are:

- i) To understand the prevailing disparities among the Misings women of Assam in general and selected villages in particular;
- ii) to explore the prevailing pattern of Socio-economic status of Mising women in the selected villages in particular;
- iii) to evolve strategies and suggest measures for the overall development of the Misings women of Assam.

### 3. DATABASE AND METHODOLOGY

The study is based on both secondary and primary data. The secondary data related to various attributes of population among the Mising tribe in particular and all scheduled tribes in general have been obtained from Census of India, 2001. Besides, existing literature available in various journals, books, Ph.D. and M.Phil. dissertations related to the topic has been consulted with a view to develop a broad theoretical framework of the present research in right perspective. Necessary primary data have been collected at household level through sample survey with the help of a well-designed survey schedule from Somkong Pagro and No.4 Ramdhan

villages to understand the socio-economic status of Mising women. The sample households in each area have been selected purposively towards understanding the socio-economic status of Mising women in both the Mising dominated village.

The data obtained from both secondary and primary sources have been processed and analysed using some simple but meaningful statistical techniques for objective and logical interpretation. The quantitative techniques adopted for the analysis are simple ratios or percentages, and certain statistical measures. The data so processed and analysed have been represented in the forms of maps and diagrams with suitable cartographic techniques for proper illustration of the patterns. Conclusions on the study area are drawn on the basis of the results derived from the data analysis and personal experience gathered through the observations during field study.

#### 4. STUDY AREA

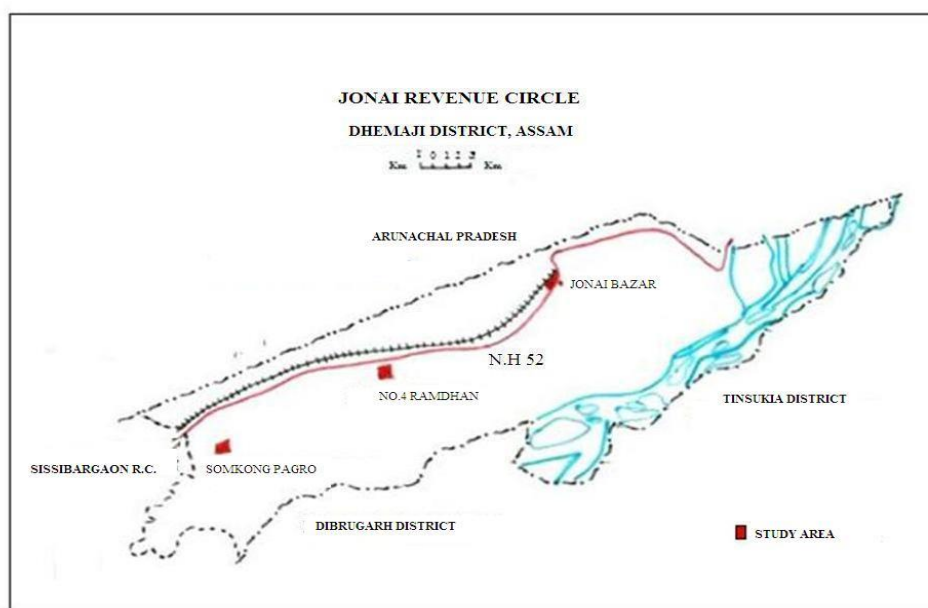
Two Mising dominated villages, namely Somkong Pagro and No. 4 Ramdhan of Jonai revenue circle have been selected for the study which constitute 98.2 percent of Mising population (2001 Census).

**i. Somkong Pagro:** Situated at a distance of 43 km from Jonai census town, the Mising dominated village Somkong Pagro is located in the south-western part of the Jonai revenue circle area. According to 2001 Census, the total population of the village was 610 living in 94 households, and it rose to 722 persons with 128 households in 2011. Out of the total population, more than 95 per cent are Mising. In the case of sex-ratio, it was 1061 females per thousand males in 2001, which decreased to 935 in 2011. The proportion of literate population in the village was 66.59 per cent in 2001, which rose to 71.05 per cent in 2011.

According to 2001 Census, the work participation rate of population in the village was 66.55 per cent. Most of the people are engaged in primary activities, especially agriculture and allied activities. Piggery, poultry and country liquor are common activities in the households of the Misings. The village is connected by pucca road with NH.52. However, overall development of the transport and communication system is not so good. Small four wheelers and three wheelers are the only modes of transport connecting this village from Simen Chapori. It is about 1 km away from the Singajan Ghat (commonly called Majorbari Ghat).

**ii. No.4 Ramdhan:** Situated at a distance of 25 km from Jonai, No.4 Ramdhan is a Mising village which is located in the north-western part of the Jonai revenue circle. According to 2001 Census, the village had a total population of 486 living in 79 households which rose to 573 persons with 85 households in 2011. Out of the total population, more than 95 percent are Misings. In the case of sex-ratio, it was 1008 females per thousand males in 2001 which decreased to 916 in 2011. The proportion of literate population in the village was 65.65 percent in 2001 which rose to 79.27 per cent in 2011. According to 2001 Census, the work participation rate of population in the village was only 38.06 per cent. Most of the people are engaged in primary activities, especially agriculture and allied activities. Piggery, poultry and country liquor are common activities in the households of the villagers. The village is connected by pucca road which connects with NH.52 highway. The transport and communication system is not so good. Small four wheelers and three wheelers are the only modes of transport connecting this village.

#### LOCATION MAP OF THE SAMPLE SURVEY AREAS



## 5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

A typical patriarchal mentality still exists among the Mising community, for which the Mising women are deprived from participating in the developmental activities of the Mising society which creates obstacles in fulfilling their potentialities. The inequalities that exist between men and women in the Mising society are however more visible in the rural areas compared to the urban areas. Women have no right to inheritance, although she is a major contributor to family economy. All decisions in family matters are taken by the male members. Mising women have absolutely no place in community's decision-making bodies. Women are generally deprived from participating in the social activities due to various factors like illiteracy, unawareness among the women, early marriage, family responsibilities, poor economic conditions, preference or support of male members to participate in social activities, etc. Although the prevailing discrimination against women is denied by most of the Misings, some facts clearly reveal that Mising women are accorded a lower status in their society. But education, which is still limited for the girls, would certainly bring about some changes in this respect.

**Table 1: Pattern of Socio-Economic Status of Mising Women in the Sample Survey Villages of Assam, 2012**

Sample Survey Area	No. of sample Households	% of women engaged in public/private job	Women's Participation in social organization	Savings in name of women
1. Somkong Pagro	30	10.4	10.8	70.0
2. No.4 Ramdhan	30	4.6	9.1	63.3

*Source: Primary Survey, 2012.*

It is witnessed that the women engaged in public/private job is very low among the Mising women in the sample survey areas. The proportion in this respect is found to be higher in Somkong Pagro and 4.6 per cent in No.4 Ramdhan. The proportion of women participating in various social organizations is comparatively higher in Somkong Pagro (10.8 per cent) than in No. 4 Ramdhan (9.1 per cent) (Table 1). In recent time savings in the name of women have significantly increased among the rural Misings. It is witnessed that saving in the name of women is as high as 70 per cent in Somkong Pagro and as low as 63.3 percent in No.4 Ramdhan .

## 6. ECONOMIC CHARACTER

Changing economic activities having associated with the rise in work participation and non-agricultural work-economic work-force reflect the race of economic progress in any area. Hence, the work participation rate, occupational composition, income and expenditure are considered meaningful indicators to understand the prevailing pattern of economic change in area. With this idea, an analysis of spatio-temporal pattern of work participation, rural-urban differential in work participation, gender disparity in work participation, inter-community variation in work participation, occupation composition, and income and expenditure pattern as prevalent in the rural and urban areas of Misings is done below.

### 6.1. Work participation rate and its gender and rural- urban disparities

The way of social life and economy of the country side is different from that of the urban area, the same way the participation rate in economic activities differs quite significantly from one another. This disparity is, however, more common in the less developed countries like India and its different parts including Assam due the nature of economy. It is worth mentioning that the proportion of working force in the rural areas is considerably larger than that of urban areas mainly due to the concentration of activities like agriculture and household industries involving large scale participation of family members irrespective of age and sex in rural areas (Chandna, 2000). Moreover, as the proportion of population engaged in school education, higher education and various govt. services has been strikingly low in the rural areas, a large segment of them enters into working force unlike in the urban areas. As a consequence, as elsewhere, the participation of children and females in economic activities becomes high in the rural areas as compared to the urban areas (Clarke, 1972).

According to 2001 Census, the total work participation rate among the Misings is found to be 51.2 per cent as against 43.2 per cent for the STs of Assam as a whole. The work participation rates among the males and females have also been found to be higher among the Misings (male: 54.0 per cent; female: 50.5 per cent) than that of ST (male: 50.5 per cent; female: 35.8 per cent). Moreover, the work participation rate is considerably higher in the rural areas.

**Table 2: Male-Female Work Participation Rate (in %) among the Misings and ST in Assam (Rural & Urban), 2001**

Population Group	Total		Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
<b>Mising</b>	54.02	48.33	54.27	48.88	40.28	16.49
<b>All ST</b>	50.49	35.77	50.84	36.73	43.40	15.88

Source: Census of India, 2001.

According to the primary survey carried out during 2012, the work participation rate is highest in Somkong Pagro (51.6 per cent) followed by No.4 Ramdhan (50.0 per cent) (Table 3). This is indicative of the fact that the traditional agro-based economy in the rural areas engages more workers in the rural areas. However, the work participation rate is higher among the males compared to their female counterparts. It is found to that in Somkong Pagro that male work participation rate is 66.2 per cent compared to 35.7 per cent of female work participation rate. In No.4 Ramdhan, it is found to be 60.9 per cent of male work participation rate against 32.8 of female work participation rate.

**Table 3: Work Participation Rate among the Misings in the Sample Survey of Assam, 2012**

Villages

Sample Survey Area	No. of Sample Households	Total Work Participation Rate (%)		
		Total	Male	Female
1. Somkong Pagro	30	51.6	66.2	35.7
2. No.4 Ramdhan	30	50.0	60.9	32.8

Source: Primary Survey, 2012.

The proportion of working force in the rural areas is considerably larger than that of the urban areas is mainly due to the concentration of activities like agriculture and household industries involving large scale participation of family members irrespective of age and sex in the rural areas (Chandna, 2000). Moreover, as the proportion of population engaged in school education and higher education has been strikingly low in the rural areas, a large segment of them enters into the working force. As a consequence, the participation of children and females in economic activities becomes high in the rural areas (Clarke, 1972).

## 6.2. Occupational Structure and its Rural-Urban Disparities

The proportion of population engaged in economic activities (work participation) and the occupational structure of the workers indicate to a great extent the overall economic development of the Misings of Assam. The proportion of workers engaged in the agricultural sectors is higher in the rural areas as compared to the urban areas.

**Table 4: Percentage of Agricultural and Non-agricultural workers (All ST & Misings) in Assam (Rural & Urban), 1971-2001**

Population Group		1971			1991			2001		
		Main Worker (%)	Agri. worker (%)	Non-Agri. Worker (%)	Main Worker (%)	Agri. worker (%)	Non-Agri. worker (%)	Main Worker (%)	Agri. worker (%)	Non-Agri. worker (%)
<b>All ST</b>	<b>R</b>	25.46	93.01	6.99	33.95	90.16	9.84	28.29	79.9	20.1
	<b>U</b>	22.95	21.79	78.21	28.14	21.21	78.79	27.01	8.53	91.47
<b>Misings</b>	<b>R</b>	-	-	-	34.56	93.81	6.19	29.67	88.72	11.28
	<b>U</b>	-	-	-	26.04	16.11	83.89	26.24	5.86	94.14

Source: Census of India, 1971, 1991, 2001.

An attempt has also been made to assess the occupational pattern and economic conditions of the people of the study areas. There is a remarkable variation in spatial distribution of workers in different sectors of occupation in both the rural and urban areas. The proportion of agricultural workers has been higher in the rural

areas, whereas the proportion of non-agricultural workers has been found to be higher in the urban areas. It is worth mentioning that the proportion of non-agricultural workers is found to be higher in Somkong Pagro (39.5 per cent) compared to No.4 Ramdhan (28.6 per cent).

**Table 5: Proportion of Workers in the Sample Survey Villages of Assam, 2012**

Sample Survey Area	No. of sample HH	Proportion of workers						Proportion of Non Agricultural Workers		
		Culti-vators	Daily Wage	HH Industry	Trade & Comm.	Govt. Services	Non Govt. services	T	M	F
1. Somkong Pagro	30	61.7	1.2	0.0	12.3	22.2	2.6	39.5	50.9	21.8
2. No.4 Ramdhan	30	71.4	0.0	2.9	6.7	11.4	7.6	28.6	34.7	18.9

Source: Primary Survey, 2012.

According to the primary survey carried out during 2012, the proportion of workers as cultivators is found to be higher compared to the proportion of workers involved in other sectors. It is found to be more than 60 per cent in both the study areas (Somkong Pagro-61.7, No.4 Ramdhan-71.4). The proportion of workers involved in other sectors is below 25 percent in both the areas. However, compared to other sectors, the proportion of worker involved in household industry and as daily wage labourers are very low. It is witnessed that workers engaged as daily labourers are not found in No.4 Ramdhan village and workers involved in household industries are not found in Somkong Pagro. However with the development of educational and communication facilities, some of them are also involved in government (Somkong Pagro-22.2 per cent, No.4 Ramdhan-11.4 per cent) and non-governmental services. The proportion of Non-Agricultural worker is higher in Somkong Pagro (39.5 per cent), followed by No.4 Ramdhan (28.6 per cent) (Table 4.27). This is indicative of the fact that the traditional agro-based economy in the rural areas engages more workers in the rural areas as compared to the urban areas. However, the work participation rate is higher among the males

compared to their female counterparts. It is found that it is 50.9 per cent as against 34.7 per cent in Somkong Pagro and 21.8 per cent as against 18.9 per cent in No.4 Ramdhan.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion reveals that the women engaged in public/private job and in various social organizations is very low which is mainly due to lack of consciousness among the women about the various developmental schemes provided by the government. The preference of male workers in various sectors also contributes to the low work participation among the female counterparts which can only be reduced if adequate measures are taken. Measures are also needed to be taken so that the prevailing gender gaps in all demographic, social and economic issues may be reduced and an all round development of the Mising community can be achieved. The can only be done when Misings with higher educational attainment and socio-economic status will help their counterparts in the eradication of poverty, ignorance, health conditions, underdevelopment, etc. by sharing their knowledge and experiences among them.

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